

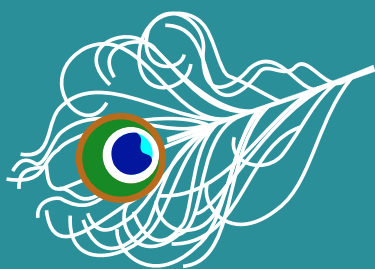
The Braj Foundation restores the sacred grove Gahvarvan in Barsana

News from
the land of
Shri Radha Krishna

VOL : 3

The Braj Foundation

Heritage, Community, Environment
www.brajfoundation.org



Gahvarvan before restoration

Some 500 years ago in Vrindavan Swami Haridas, guru of famous musician Mian Tansen and Baiju Bawra, composed several verses to please Lord Krishna. It was due to his intense bhakti that the famous deity of Shri Bankey Bihari ji appeared before him. In one of his compositions Swamiji describes how the Divine Couple are slowly walking into the dense forest of Gahvarvan. In this composition Lord Krishna says to Radha Rani *pyari joo aagey chal, Gehvarvan mein chal, Jahan bolen koyal ri...*

Gahvarvan has witnessed several transcendental pastimes of Sri Radha & Krishna. This grove is situated at the foothill of the Brahmagiri hills in



Mr. Kamal Morarka, Chairman, The Braj Foundation inspecting the restoration work

Barsana village of Mathura Dist. in UP. Gahvarvan is considered to be the private estate of Sri Radha Rani. It is in this grove that She roams freely with Her *sakhis*. None can enter Gahvarvan without Her permission, not even Lord Krishna, Her eternal beloved. There is a

saying that - , *Gehvarvan key vaas ki aas karen shiv sesh, yaa ki mahima ko kahe, yahan shiam dharey sakhi waish*. Even lord Brahma and Shiva hanker to spend a night in Gahvarvan so that they can have the glimpse of Sri Radha Rani, the internal potency of Sri Krishna.

Such a wonderful grove, which finds mention in the scriptures, was neglected for decades. The villagers had encroached upon most of its



Gahvarvan after restoration

land. The tall trees were cut down by greedy Gram Pradhans. It was then the revolutionary saint of Braj Sri Ramesh Baba, waged a war to protect this grove. He succeeded



The Divine couple in the *nikunj* of Gahvarvan

after 46 years, when this grove was declared as protected forest and the UP Forest Dept. took charge of it.

Inside stories

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Wisdom Words

You should serve the Dham by protecting and nurturing the creepers and trees of Braj and by taking care of the calves, deers and peacocks of Braj. You should sweep the groves of Braj to invoke the mercy of the Lord.

Swami Haridas.



Gahvarvan during restoration



Gahvarvan restoration plan

From Vrindavan



Dear Readers!

In Braj Bhakti Vilas, the famous scripture, there is a mention of 137 groves associated with the pastimes of Sri Radha and Krishna in Braj. Unfortunately, only three out of 137 groves have survived the onslaught of human negligence. The other groves of Braj area vary from 5 acres to 550 acres. It is a depressing sight for the saints and pilgrims who visit these groves around the year, to see the state of the groves. The pilgrims come to Braj expecting to find beautiful groves laden with flower bearing trees, spreading a pleasing fragrance, as they have read in descriptions of narratives of Krishna Lila. What they find in reality is something they would have never imagined. The sacred groves are either overgrown with thorny bushes or lying barren or then, serve as dumping grounds for heaps of garbage, stagnant dirty water and so on.

The Braj Foundation has taken up the self assignment to restore all the 134 forests of Braj to protect the environmental heritage of this land of Krishna. Forestation is the need of the hour. Global warming and the melting of glaciers is a direct consequence of the reduction of forests. Irrespective of ideology or religion, one may welcome this exercise as a necessity for each one of us. Under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), private and public companies can come forward to help us in achieving our targets in the shortest period possible. Incidentally, there is a global understanding that a tree planted anywhere in the world benefits everyone on the planet. It is with this hope we look forward to your sustained support and encouragement.

Dr. Manju Mehta

Unfortunately, its plight did not change even after this. It remained in a pathetic and neglected state, with heaps of garbage, no irrigation facility and serving as a den for pigs and stray animals. The pilgrims and saints who came here, felt troubled by the condition of the van. The Braj Foundation intervened and made an appeal to **Mr. S. Behuria, Chairman Indian Oil Corporation Limited**, who liked the Power Point Presentation of the foundation and sanctioned Rs. 10 Lakhs for its revival and beautification. The foundation added a few lakhs of its own and the *kunja* or sacred grove was restored. A pucca foundation and an eight feet high and thick barbed wire



Inspection being done by IOCL officers

fencing mounted on iron angle frames encloses and protects the grove. Pathways of Dholpur stone have been laid for the convenience of pilgrims. Stone benches have been installed.

A drip irrigation facility has been installed throughout the grove to ensure perennial irrigation for the plants and trees. Intensive plantation has already been done and two gardeners have been appointed to take care of the grove. The entire work was done with the administrative support of

the UP Forest Dept. and Dist. Admn.

Gahvarvan is now a pleasurable place of pause for many pilgrims and the local people have been very appreciative of this initiative of **The Braj Foundation**. However, the other three sections of the grove across the road are yet to be restored. The Foundation is making an appeal to Mr. Behuria to sanction the budget for the other parts of the



Gahvarvan after restoration

grove as well. We hope that soon enough we will be able to undertake the remaining parts of the grove. You are welcome to visit this grove on your next visit to Barsana. Please feel free to contact us for further information or support.

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Action in field



BAIF officials with TBF representatives doing the survey

Survey of sacred groves of Braj

Realizing the need to document all relevant information on the 137 transcendental groves The Braj Foundation hired the services of a Pune based NGO, BAIF, which has high credentials in this area and is chaired by a great philanthropist, **Sh. Arvind Bhai Mafatlal** of Mumbai. BAIF's team did extensive survey of 26 groves of Braj along with the survey team of the Foundation. The remaining surveys are being done in-house by the Foundation. We are collecting data about the land size of the groves, location, revenue record, cultural history, the available sources of irrigation and types of soil etc. We are taking several photographs of each grove to record the evidence of its present plight. Those interested in extending physical or financial support to this historic work are welcome to contact our offices in Delhi or Vrindavan.



Water tank at the water supply project

Supply of drinking water to villages of Braj

Over 90% area of Braj has only saline water, hence sweet drinking water is a problem in the villages of Braj. The villagers have to fetch drinking water from far off wells. Realizing this problem of the local community, The Braj Foundation approached, **Oil Industry Development Board (OIDB)**, through **Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOCL)**. A project of supplying drinking water to two villages of Barsana i.e., **Chiksauli** and **Maanpur**, was sanctioned by the Board. The Braj Foundation dug a deep bore well, constructed two water tanks of 1.15 Lakh liters capacity each, installed heavy duty pumps and the distribution pipeline has been laid down in the villages.

Media report

Ever since The Braj Foundation and its community mobilization wing, Braj Rakshak Dal started the serious and dedicated work of restoration and conservation of ancient water bodies, groves, hills and heritage buildings of Braj, the national media has taken a keen interest in reporting its work. We appreciate journalists, who would like to independently report our sincere efforts and their impact on the local community. We will be glad to provide the required logistical support as we welcome objective viewpoints. We welcome more and more journalists to make the effort to travel to Braj and report their findings on this valuable and important heritage of tradition and culture of Krishna's land.



Mr. LK Advani meeting the representatives of Braj Rakshak Dal and The Braj Foundation on the issue of destruction of heritage hills of Braj



The community mobilization wing of The Braj Foundation, Braj Rakshak Dal has been fighting a sustained battle against the illegal mining of heritage hills in Deeg and Kaman Tehsil of Dist. Bharatpur of Rajasthan. This area falls within the cultural zone of Braj 84 Kos. 72 Kms of hill range in this area has prototype of all the spiritually significant hills of India such as, Himalaya, Vindhya and Trikoot and Mainak of Srilanka. Lord Krishna granted them permission to settle in Braj so that they can see the transcendental leelas of Radha and Krishna. It is unfortunate that

the BJP led Govt. of Rajasthan has paid no heed to the demands of local Brajwasis, saints, environmentalists and devotees from world over. The representatives of Braj Rakshak Dal met the BJP president and leader of opposition to express their concern on this issue. It is surprising that the much desired protection of Ram-Setu has become the main agenda of the same party which is instrumental in the destruction of heritage hills associated with Lord Krishna. We pray to these leaders to respond to our sincere appeals.



Mr. M. V. Nair
CMD
Union Bank of India

Union Bank of India donates Tractor Trolleys to the Foundation

Tractor trolleys are the most essential equipments of our field operations. For desilting a kund we need atleast 4 tractor trolleys with one earthmover. For carting the building material, plants, manure, etc. we frequently need the tractor trolleys. Our current requirement is of 16 tractor trolleys to match 4 earthmovers.

We are happy that Mr. M. V. Nair, CMD of Union Bank of India has sympathetically considered our request and has donated one tractor (Swaraj 834 FE) with two trolleys to The Braj Foundation. This has been a boom for our field operations.

We have prominently displayed the name of **Union Bank of India** on these vehicles. The Braj Foundation thanks Mr. Nair for this generous help and looks forward to similar gesture from other Chairmen of banks and financial institutions.



Forthcoming Events



Radha Rani Braj Yatra 2007



Radha Rani Braj Yatra 2007

The annual Radha Rani Braj Yatra started from Gehvarvan on 24th Oct. Led by Sri Ramesh Baba, over 7000 yatris from India and abroad are walking 12 Kms everyday. Boarding, lodging and transportation is being offered free by Sri Maan Mandir Sewa Sansthan, which organizes this 40 days yatra every year. This year's yatra will end in Barsana on Nov. 30th 2007. This yatra has created mass awareness about the heritage of Braj.

In 2003, Mr. Vineet Narain, CEO of The Braj Foundation, produced a TV serial on this yatra, which was aired for the first time by DD1, Jagran and Aastha TV channels. The DVDs and VCDs of this serial have generated enough curiosity and interest about Braj amongst the NRIs in USA and other parts of the world.

Sri Ramesh Baba's inspiration led to the formation of The Braj Foundation, which is dedicated for the restoration of the kunds, groves, hills and heritage buildings of Braj. If you are interested in joining this yatra, you may contact at Barsana Tel. No. 05662-246077.

For further information please feel free to contact our offices.

